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Insight

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Q. I especially enjoyed "Legacy of the Caesars" by Robert L. Odom in the Nov.-Dec. issue. But if the Romans were so open-minded toward the Jews, why did they persecute so many million Christians? What made the difference? You teach church history. Maybe you can tell.

A. Romans weren't so ruthless as the rumors have it. The Caesars didn't seize near so many saints as you suppose.

The true story is amazing. Maybe I'll write it up for LIBERTY, if the editor insists.

Q. I protest vehemently your assertion (Sept.-Oct.) that in order for God at last to bring in a reign of righteousness "it is the basic motivation of . . . LIBERTY to help as many as possible cast their lives freely and of their own choice on the side of Jesus Christ." Your masthead says, "Dedicated to preservation of religious freedom." Proselytizing and religious freedom do not go hand in hand, as history shows.

A. Genuine commitment to the cause of freedom can be so demanding ("Give me liberty, or give me death") that it should surely be based on moral rather than opportunistic concepts; hence (I believe) such commitment is more effective when related to Jesus Christ than when derived from a secular ethic.

Some Christians (Puritans) hanged witches. Granted. Yet other Christians (Baptists, Unitarians, et cetera) helped frame the First Amendment.

It is my hope certainly that people will find in Christ true freedom; freedom not only for themselves but also from any desire to dominate others.

Jesus said, "Bless them that curse you" (Luke 6:28).

"If then the Son [Christ] sets

you free, you will indeed be free" (John 8:36 N.E.B.).*

Q. You are on my special list of bigots. It infuriates me how you talk out of both sides of your mouth. You say God is good and yet He is going to torture people in hell for eternity. Even Hitler wasn't that bad. It would be poetic justice if you ended up enjoying the torments you wish on others. . . . How could I worship a God like yours?

A. I don't believe you could. I couldn't.

Because God is good He will one day have to put an end to evil. Then all cruel, scheming sinners will be deprived of life so that goodness can prevail and "the meek . . . inherit the earth." But the destruction of the wicked will be brief and final. They will burn like "stubble," the Bible says, and cease to exist (Malachi 4). "The wicked will be no more; look well, and you will find their place is empty" (Psalm 37:10, N.E.B.).*

The God of love contemplates even this brief punishment of the most incorrigible rebels with dread and reluctance. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezekiel 33:11).

Q. Where would we be in this country without labor unions? I hate to think of the sweatshops, twelve-hour days, seven-day weeks, et cetera, we'd still have if it weren't for unions. If LIBERTY is sincerely interested in American freedoms, what about the freedom from oppressive labor conditions the unions represent? Please don't knock unions. They do a lot for the poor.

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A. Like requiring union carpenters not to use power tools and thus making houses cost more than poor people can pay?

Like bumping officers of locals who favor political candidates not on the approved list?

Like forcing a man to sign up even when his conscience forbids him to?

Unions are a mixed bag. So far as I can see LIBERTY authors cry over the onions, not the potatoes.

Q. A friend recently called my attention to a theory that Jesus was crucified not on Friday as most Christians believe but on Wednesday, and that He arose on Saturday afternoon, not on Sunday morning. It claims to be the only timing possible that fits Christ's repeated promise to be in the tomb three days and three nights.

A. Jesus also said "within three days" and "after three days" (Mark 14:58; 8:31). We are dealing with idioms.

Different peoples count time differently. Until recently, in Japan for example, a baby was "one year old" at birth—and became "two years old" on New Year's Day, even if that was the next day!

Many cultures count an interval by including the first day. In Luke 13:32, 33 "the third day" is not three days from now but "the day after tomorrow"—which we would call the second day from now.

In Luke 24:46 "the first day of the week" (Sunday) on which Christ arose is called "the third day" since the crucifixion, referring to "the day before yesterday" (Friday). It could not possibly refer to Wednesday!

But it is not necessary to solve the chronological complexities of the crucifixion in order to receive the grace of the Crucified.